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ABSTRACT

The manual addresses elements needed to provide an appropriate education for gifted students in North Carolina. Eleven components are considered: administrative support and responsibility (program design, utilization of resources); definition and identification (screening); assessment of student needs (group and individual needs); written plans (statements of philosophy and goals, procedures); program options (grouping options and individual options); curriculum (content, process, learning environment); teachers (appropriate training, good interpersonal relations); support services (media specialist, school counselor); funding (categorical funds, staff development, local funds); community awareness and parent involvement; and program evaluation (formative and summative). Factors beyond the control of local school systems which affect program quality, such as adequate personnel preparation, are also discussed. An additional factsheet provides brief answers to such questions as: Why do gifted students need an appropriate education: What was the Task Force on Appropriate Services for Gifted Students? How was the concept, "an appropriate education;" defined? What "elements" were identified as being essential to programs providing an appropriate education for gifted students? What can local school systems do to make best use of the report? (CL)

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What Is An Appropriate Education For A Gifted Student?

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The North Carolina Association for the Gifted and Talented (NCAGT) is an organization of educators, parents, and others interested in fostering the development of gifted students. It attempts to do so by utilizing the abilities of its members in public service activities, and through a wide variety of services and activities that support those who aid in the development of gifted students. These services and activities include the publication of booklets on topics of interest to educators and parents of the gifted, providing low cost teacher workshops in various parts of the state, sponsorship of the Outstanding Contributions and Teacher of the Year awards in education for the gifted, advisory and advocacy efforts within the State Department of Public Instruction and in the General Assembly, publication of the Newsletter and other materials for members, and cosponsorship with Parents for the Advancement of Gifted Education (PAGE) of the Annual State Conference on Education for the Gifted.

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BACKGROUND

Academically gifted students in North Carolina are considered to be "children with special needs" and North Carolina law requires that we provide "a free appropriate publicly supported education to every child with special needs." While there is little disagreement about the meaning of the concepts "free" and "publicly supported," the question *"What constitutes an appropriate education for a gifted student?"* has proven to be more difficult to resolve. Decision-makers at the level of the local school system who want to do what the letter and the spirit of the law require are often at a loss when it comes to arriving at a satisfactory answer to this question. In addition, many of these individuals are not sufficiently aware of many of the important factors that need to be considered when attempting to provide an appropriate education for gifted students. As a result, even if the decision is made to provide a program to try to reach this goal, that decision may prove to be difficult to implement effectively.

How then can this question be resolved? The General Assembly or a court could decide. But in both instances the way in which a decision might be reached may not be conducive to a full consideration of such a complex question, especially given the absense of a great amount of background information and the probable lack of firsthand experience with the gifted among those who would be asked to decide. A better way would seem to be one in which a number of people -- among the most knowledgeable in North Carolina with regard to education for the gifted -- could consider the question with enough time to allow for a thoughtful conclusion. In that way if the legislature or a court were to take up the question, then information from this group could be made available to them. In addition, if this group not only addressed the general question but also attempted to articulate some of the most important factors related to providing an appropriate education, then local decision-makers trying to do what is right for their gifted students could benefit as well.

This is exactly what the NCAGT has tried to help accomplish. After completing a statewide survey of educators, parents and others, two groups were formed. A Working Group of twelve people met over a six-month period to analyze the survey data, to engage in lengthy discussions about elements, factors and issues, and ultimately to draft a report organizing this information. An Advisory Committee of 182 people was also formed to provide initial input to the Working Group, to respond to summaries and drafts of Working Group activity, and in general, to provide the perspective that a smaller group could not have. Both groups together constituted the NCAGT Task Force on Appropriate Services for Gifted Students. Both groups together represented not only a wealth of knowledge and experience in education for the gifted, but also a wide range of geographic areas, sizes and types of communities and schools, and roles played in education and the community.

Beginning on the next page with the Task Force's initial statement, and continuing with a consideration of essential elements and factors beyond local school system control, is the Task Force's report.

The goal of American public schools is to provide a good education for all children and to give each child an opportunity to grow toward the fulfillment of his or her potential. Gifted students are those of high potential or demonstrated ability who have special needs that must be addressed and met if these students are to have an opportunity to fulfill their potential. Their advanced abilities separate them from other students so that even an excellent regular education program is not sufficient to meet their needs.

North Carolina law requires "a free appropriate publicly supported education (for) every child with special needs" (GS115C-106(b)) and includes gifted students in the broader category of "children with special needs." It thus becomes very important to determine how the special needs of gifted students can be met.

Appropriate education is defined by the extent to which the needs of individual gifted students are met by the school system. This definition is put into practice when a system assesses student needs and then plans, implements and supports a program to bridge the gap between the regular education program and the educational needs of the gifted child. Specifically, the elements of the educational program that are most essential in providing an appropriate education for gifted children are the following:

Administrative Support and Responsibility
Definition and Identification
Assessment of Student Needs
Written Plan
Program Options
Curriculum
Teachers
Support Services
Funding
Community Awareness Parent Involvement
Program Evaluation

In addition to the factors that need to be addressed within these elements, there are other Factors Beyond Local School System Control Which Affect Program Quality.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT AND RESPONSIBILITY

The main responsibility for providing appropriate services for gifted students is that of the administration within the local school system. The administration includes the local board of education, the superintendent of schools, supervisory personnel, principals, program coordinators, lead teachers and others who make key administrative decisions. Each plays a part in these responsibilities, but the school system itself determines how these decisions are made and who makes them. Effective administration requires the determination of functional policies related to factors such as program design, teacher preparedness and staff development, utilization of human, financial and physical resources, program improvement through evaluation, and effective public relations procedures. Thus in-service training specific to the nature and needs of gifted students is needed for these decision-makers. In addition, system-wide cooperation among all administrators is a necessity, accompanied by full knowledge of, and adherence to state regulations that relate to gifted students.

Examples of statements which guide policy determination and procedures of implementation:

Program Design

1. Consistent services should be provided at each grade level throughout the school system.
2. There should be evidence of skill development and sequential curriculum when the program for the gifted is examined across all grade levels.
3. Non-traditional placements should be considered for those students whose needs and abilities surpass needs and abilities addressed by the established program for the gifted.
4. Depending on the size of the school system and the number of identified students served, consideration should be given to the need for a full or part time program supervisor.
5. The program should accommodate the needs of gifted students who are also classified in other areas of exceptionality, such as learning disabled, emotionally handicapped, visually impaired, etc.

Teacher Preparedness and Development

1. Teachers of the gifted should be certified in education for the gifted.
2. Regular class teachers should be encouraged to take advantage of staff development and/or college courses specific to education for the gifted.
3. Teachers of the gifted should be actively supported in their professional growth through advanced study in content and/or professional areas, conference attendence, workshops, and opportunities to meet and plan together.
4. The selection and assignment of teachers of the gifted should be based on criteria that include teacher training in education for the gifted, mastery of content area and demonstrated teaching success.
5. The school system should recognize and reward teacher development and achievement in the program for the gifted.

Utilization of Resources

1. Classroom space, laboratories, library and media center space, equipment and materials should be adequate to serve the learning abilities of gifted students.
2. Textbooks and learning materials should be chosen that are suitable for the advanced abilities of gifted students.
3. Additional state and local sources of funding for the gifted program should be sought beyond what regular and exceptional children state allotments provide.
4. Such factors as teacher-pupil ratio, caseload, number of schools served and additional general classroom responsibilities, etc. should be examined carefully to determine reasonable and appropriate professional assignments and time commitments for the teacher of the gifted.
5. The human and physical resources of the community should be surveyed, used and evaluated both in and out of school for gifted students.

Program Evaluation

1. Annual assessments should be made of the program for the gifted, followed by in-depth periodic evoluation.
2. Follow-up procedures, such as surveys, interviews, etc. should be carried out for students who have graduated or otherwise left the program for the gifted.
3. Teachers, students, parents and outside consultants should be involved in the evaluation of the program for the gifted.

Public Relations

1. The school administration should report to various publics on the purposes, plans, procedures and outcomes of the program for the gifted.

2. Parents and other interested parties should be informed of the most effective avenues for communicating with the school administration.

3. School administrators should counsel and inform the board of education and other agencies about the individual and programmatic needs of gifted students.

To reiterate, the cooperative endeavors of local school administrators is a professional necessity in order to inaugurate, carry out, evaluate and publicize a quality program for gifted students.

DEFINITION AND IDENTIFICATION

In the broadest sense, gifted children are children of high potential or demonstrated ability in specific or general areas. In practice, the areas in which giftedness is recognized vary from time to time and place to place according to prevailing values, available resources and other considerations.

Currently North Carolina defines gifted children as "academically gifted" (AG), provides standards for identification and mandates that they receive an appropriate education. It must be noted that giftedness can encompass a broader range of ability than is denoted by the term "academically gifted." Local school systems may wish to go beyond mandated services and provide opportunities for students with ability in areas such as:

1. visual or performing arts,
2. leadership,
3. creative and productive thinking.

State funding for exceptional children, however, may only be used to provide programs for students identified according to state criteria as academically gifted.

Stated simply, identification is the process of finding those students whose characteristics match the definition. The use of information from a variety of sources is desirable. While objective data such as standardized test scores may indicate some degree of student ability, subjective data are also important. Subjective data such as grades, checklists, student/parent/teacher/peer nominations, and self-knowledge inventories may indicate characteristics and behaviors often associated with gifted students that are not revealed by objective data. A two-stage process for the use of this data is recommended.

Screening The goal of this stage is the formation of a pool of students from which gifted students can be identified. The student population is assessed using a variety of measures, including a range of subjective indicators. An attempt is made to "screen in" rather than to "screen out" at this stage of the process.

Identification The goal of this stage is the selection of those students who meet established identification criteria. Evaluation instruments of better quality can be used and more accurate assessment should be possible if a smaller number of students is assessed (i.e. those in the pool selected during the screening stage), than if an attempt is made to identify gifted students directly by assessing the entire student population.

The issue of non-discrimination in identification is in part addressed with system-wide consistency in screening and identification procedures and with the use of both objective and subjective data. Because of environmental or cultural differences, or the presence of physical, emotional or learning handicaps, some standardized tests may fail to adequately measure the ability of some students. Further testing may be recommended in any of the following situations:

1. discrepancies exist between test scores, such as between current and previous IQ test scores, current and previous achievement test scores, current IQ and achievement test scores;
2. discrepancies are noted between test scores and classroom performance, such as between low achievement or IQ test scores and high grades, or between high IQ or achievement test scores and low grades;
3. lack of supportive home environment is known; or
4. a physical, emotional or learning handicap has been diagnosed.

This further testing is designed to provide a more accurate assessment of the student and may require the use of individual testing, criterion-referenced tests, etc. The Division for Exceptional Children of the State Department of Public Instruction can provide a list of recommended tests.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT NEEDS

While identification determines whether or not a student is appropriate for the program, the assessment of student needs helps to determine whether or not the program is appropriate for the student. This assessment is done at two levels.

Assessment of Group Needs At this level the characteristics and needs of a number of gifted students are taken into account, and program decisions are made in an attempt to meet the students' needs. The number of gifted students considered could vary, for example, from all gifted students in the sixth grade to all gifted students in the primary grades. A Group Education Program (GEP) for these students could be the result of this process. Factors to be considered in assessing group needs include the following:

1. The definition of giftedness and the identification methods used. What are the defined and measured abilities of these students, and will the program(s) match these abilities?

2. Local values, needs, strengths. What do the characteristics of local students say about what the focus or theme of the program(s) should be? Are there local school/community characteristics that should be taken into account to make the program(s) "uniquely appropriate" for these students?

Assessment of Individual Needs At this level the characteristics and needs of individual gifted students are taken into account, and decisions involving program and service options are made in an attempt to better meet the needs of individual students. This can be done in two ways:

1. Information on individual students is obtained periodically. Sources of this information include item analysis of criterion-referenced tests; teacher observation; assessments of interest, self concept, learning styles, etc.; talking with the student. This information could be used to individualize the GEP.

2. Information on an individual student is obtained because it appears necessary in order to ensure that appropriate services are being provided. Sometimes it is apparent that what might be appropriate for the grade-typical group of gifted students may not be entirely appropriate for a particular student, as in the case of a particular learning disabled gifted child. Sometimes a situation like this becomes apparent over time, as in the case of a highly gifted student for whom grade-typical gifted placement appears to be not enough. Parents and teachers can be important sources of information in such situations. Additional individual testing may be called for. The school-based committee composed of persons such as the principal, teacher referring the student, director of programs for exceptional children, teacher of the gifted, psychologist, school counselor, and/or others may provide important perspectives, particularly on service options. This process may result in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) being developed for this individual.

Within the category of gifted students, a wide range of student ability, interests, motivation and other important characteristics is apparent. An awareness of group and individual differences is necessary to ensure that appropriate services are being provided.

WRITTEN PLAN

A written plan is an important part of a school system's gifted program. A plan outlines a system's unified efforts to provide appropriate services to its gifted students. The plan will outline the system's philosophy, goals, identification scheme and evaluation plans. Individual schools are free to implement their programs in their own way as long as they continue to meet the overall plan of the system.

A written plan assists the total program by accomplishing the following:

Defining a Program A written plan defines a program because it commits to paper the essential facts about the program. Each local school system would decide how detailed their plan should be. Some local school systems may find it beneficial to have a detailed plan; others may work best with only an outline of the program.

Communicating A written plan makes it easier to communicate about the program to the public and to other programs within the local school system. It acts as an outline that ensures the communication of consistent information about the program whether it is for a brochure, Southern Association Self-Study, or grant writing, etc.

Establishing Responsiblity A written plan also establishes responsibility both for the program and within the program. It helps in the establishment of procedures and the allocation of resources.

Providing Continuity A written plan might be considered most useful to the total program because it provides for continuity. The turnover of key administrators is less likely to disrupt the program if a written plan is in place.

A written plan should include a statement of philosphy and goals, a program description, procedural policies and additional information as needed.

Philosophy and Goals The philosophy statement should speak to the purpose of the program and to specific educational approaches that will be used and reflect the commitment of the system to gifted students. The goals should reflect the needs of the school system. Specifically, the goals should address the direction of the program and the plans for continued growth and improvement.

Description The description of the program should include an outline of its major components, the number of students being served, teacher staffing patterns and the involvement of support services.

Procedures The procedures for the program should outline the major components of student identification, assessment of student needs, program administration and evaluation, teacher training and parent involvement.

Other Opportunities This section is optional. It could include a list of opportunities outside the gifted program which are also available to gifted students in the system. Examples of outside opportunities might include community symphony, Governor's School, community art /music shows, Saturday programs, Odyssey of the Mind.

In essence a written plan can include all of the elements discussed in this report.

It is most effective if it is

1. Written by a group that represents a cross section of the school system and community, such as teachers, administrators, students and parents; and

2. Reviewed and updated annually, with a copy placed on file in all local schools and with the Division for Exceptional Children of the State Department of Public Instruction.

PROGRAM OPTIONS

There are numerous ways for a system to organize an appropriate education for gifted students. Both group and individual program options should be combined to form a program that is flexible enough to meet the varying needs of gifted students. Grouping options include, but are not limited to, cluster grouping within a classroom, in-class resource, pull-out resource, instructional grouping by content area, self-contained programs and special schools. Individual options include, but are not limited to, acceleration, dual enrollment, independent study, mentorships and extensions.

Grouping Options

Cluster Grouping Gifted students are grouped together within a regular classroom setting. The classroom teacher, with training in education for the gifted and the support of a consultant teacher certified in education for the gifted, plans and implements appropriate curriculum and strategies for these students.

In-Class Resource A teacher certified in education for the gifted works in the regular classroom with the regular classroom teacher to provide appropriate instruction and curriculum directly to gifted students. This option is most effective when used in conjunction with cluster grouping.

Pull-Out Resource Gifted students leave their regular classroom for a significant amount of time to work directly with a teacher certified in education for the gifted. This option extends the regular curriculum or provides unique experiences.

Instructional Grouping by Content Area Students of similar ability are grouped together for instruction in a particular content area. This group could be composed of all gifted students or could include other students with high aptitude in that content area. Teachers should be certified in both the content area and in education for the gifted.

Self-Contained Programs Gifted students are grouped together for all classes. Teachers must be certified in education for the gifted.

Special Schools Gifted students are brought together on one site for part or all of their instruction. Magnet schools are one example. Occasionally, a district may transport students for a portion of the day to another school to provide more peer interaction and curriculum choices.

Individual Options

Acceleration Gifted students with high aptitude and social/emotional maturity are moved into a higher level or grade for part or all of the instructional day. Examples follow:

1. A fourth grade student participates with the fifth grade reading group.
2. A third grade student is released to work with a sixth grade class during their study of oceanography, a special interest area of the third grade child.
3. A sixth grade student is promoted directly to the eighth grade.
4. A student participates in Advanced Placement courses.
5. A 5-year-old child bypasses public kindergarten and enters the first grade one year early.

Dual Enrollment in College or University High school students who need advanced courses or other courses not available in their high school are allowed to spend part of their day on a college campus taking courses which are used for both high school and college credit. This design could include college correspondence courses for students attending schools in remote areas where a college campus is not readily accessible. An example might be a high school student interested in medicine who is allowed to participate in Latin at a local college or through a college correspondence course when that course is not available at his or her school.

Independent Study A student with a special interest contracts with a teacher in a relevant content area to allow that student to learn more about that topic. Learning experiences could include an experiment, guided reading, or the development of some type of apparatus, computer program, paper or other product.

Mentorships In a mentor program, gifted students can associate with and learn from community and regional leaders in such areas as politics, finance, communications, art, music, writing, industry, education, ecology, medicine, law, science, and any other realm of human endeavor where leadership and creativity may be nurtured. Contacts may take place during the school day or after school, on weekends, and during the summer, and are coordinated by a staff member in the school system.

Extensions Students who seek additional learning experiences beyond those provided during the school day might participate in activities such as after school and/or Saturday enrichment classes, summer programs, and extracurricular competitions.

All of the options listed above are administrative provisions that -- in some combination and in varying degrees -- help meet the needs of individual gifted students by

1. Allowing them to interact with students -- and others -- of similar ability and interests;
2. Allowing them to be taught by a teacher particularly well qualified in terms of his or her knowledge and understanding of gifted students and of a content area;
3. Providing curriculum considered to be particularly appropriate for gifted students; and
4. Providing sufficient time so that the benefits of the combination of factors listed in 1-3 above can take place.

It is clear that some grouping options provide a greater combination of the above factors than do others. It is also clear that time is a critical factor in determining the possible effectiveness of any option. As time is reduced to a low 1-2 hours per week of service in any given grouping option, for example, the potential benefits of interaction, qualified teaching and suitable curriculum are also reduced.

The needs of gifted students in the local community, together with local conditions and attitudes, govern which of the grouping options are chosen by the local school system. Individual options are generally utilized when a gifted student reveals special patterns of interest or development not easily met by existing school programs, or is so advanced relative to age mates as to require individual planning such as acceleration, mentors or independent study.

Just as gifted students vary among themselves in interests, aptitudes and motivation, so must program modifications vary to meet their needs in substance, scope and structure.

CURRICULUM

Gifted students can generally move through the comprehension and application of information at a faster pace so that time is made available for more in-depth study and complexity. Curricula for gifted students must be responsive to the characteristics that separate the gifted from the non-gifted. Curricular modifications assume the existence of an adequate general education program. It is also assumed that curriculum modifications will directly address the academic content areas in which the student's strengths are identified and that instruction will be at a level commensurate with the student's ability.

Beyond these general assumptions, the following types of modifications are considered to be necessary if an effective curriculum for gifted students is to be evidenced.

Content

1. Concentrate on complex systems of ideas that are within the capabilities of gifted students.

2. Incorporate content areas in addition to those usually stressed as part of the regular program. These content modifications can include in-depth study of topics within a content area, specialized interests related to a content area, and or specific topics such as leadership skills, decision-making, creative problem-solving, communication skills, and career exploration.

3. Use curriculum techniques such as curriculum compacting and/or in-depth study of specific content that correspond to the students level of ability.

4. Include content that helps students to see relationships among various topics across disciplines.

5. Encourage students to develop products that meet the high level of expectations that are commensurate with their level of ability and previous instruction. These expectations should reflect an emphasis on quality not quantity.

6. Incorporate studies which provide students with state-of-the-art tools for learning. Studies of advanced technologies such as computers are important not only as a learning experience in and of themselves, but also as tools for students to use in expanding their learning opportunties.

Process

1. Involve students in structuring some of their own learning activities, including those concerning their individual interests. Gifted students are often self-motivated, independent thinkers. Their response in a classroom is often directly related to their responsibility in determining the structure of some of their own learning activities. Therefore we should involve students in structuring learning activities.

2. Encourage and facilitate the use of higher level thought processes through specific activities and questioning strategies. Many models have been developed by individuals such as Raths, Meeker, Taba, and Bloom, etc., which teachers can use to achieve this objective.

3. Provide opportunities for reflection and discussion. Students need time to think and talk through the processes they employ in problem-solving and other activities.

4. Encourage the application of learning to current real-life situations and to those of the future.

Learning environment

1. Structure a supportive learning atmosphere. Because many gifted students are perfectionists, risk-taking is often a threatening experience. If they are to explore new ideas and develop unique solutions, they must feel comfortable with the possibility of failure.

2. Design an environment that provides the necessary tools and mobility. Gifted students must have access to more sophisticated resources if they are to pursue more complex activities. They must also be free to choose how and where they will study and use the resources available.

3. Provide cooperative learning experiences. Gifted students need the opportunity to work with other gifted students.

4. Encourage independence, self-discipline and responsibility. Students must learn self-evaluation skills as well as organization skills if they are going to pursue activities independently. Mastering these skills is best accomplished as students discover this need and structure their experiences accordingly.

TEACHERS

Since teachers are the primary providers of services to students, their importance in the education of gifted students cannot be overstated. All educators have a responsibility to recognize giftedness and to initiate the assessment and placement of students. Whoever assumes responsibility for the academic content area in which the student is identified as gifted is charged with the appropriate education of the student.

The teacher of the gifted must be certified in education for the gifted and may assume total responsibility for the content area or help develop program options that involve the classroom teacher. Classroom teachers and others who have a significant responsibility for the education of gifted students should also be trained in education for the gifted.

There are many characteristics that are desirable in all teachers working with the gifted. Some of the most important of these are outlined below:

The Desire to Teach Gifted Students A teacher of gifted students should personally feel comfortable working with high-ability students. In order to be effective, the desire to teach gifted students is particularly important. These teachers should enjoy the challenge and intellectual stimulation of working with this group.

Appropriate Training in Education for the Gifted Good course work or in-service experience in education for the gifted provides information and insights into the nature of gifted students and their needs, and approaches to service. Subject matter preparation alone is not enough. It is highly desirable that *all teachers* who are going to provide any significant portion of a gifted student's education, especially the classroom teacher in the area of the student's strong ability, also have some training in education for the gifted. The need for information about and insight into this kind of student also applies to several other individuals who could be important in providing or supporting this "teaching" function. Included among the most important of these individuals are principals, counselors, and library/media center personnel.

Knowledge of Content While the first two characteristics are essential, they do not ensure that the teacher can appropriately serve gifted students. The teacher of the gifted should have strong academic preparation in his or her content areas and have a wide variety of interests and experiences related to these areas.

Good Interpersonal Relations Because an appropriate education for the gifted requires the unified effort of various people within a school system, the teacher of the gifted should have good interpersonal skills and the ability to work well with many people. The ability to communicate the needs of the gifted to peers, administrators and others is imperative.

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SUPPORT SERVICES

There are other professionals that are important in providing support services for gifted students. Support personnel include school counselors, media specialists, psychologists, and others. Staff development is necessary to ensure that providers of support services can meet the unique needs of each gifted child.

School Counselor Gifted students have particular needs that can be met through specialized applications within guidance programs and through extensions of counseling services. These include

1. Helping students to understand and accept their giftedness, to develop a positive self concept, and to cope effectively with stress;
2. Assessing each student's needs for purposes of identification, educational placement, and interests;
3. Exploring possible career choices;
4. Providing information about financial and educational resources so that these students can reach their career goals;
5. Acquainting each student with special educational opportunities, summer programs, special schools, etc.

Media Specialist The informed media specialist can be an integral part of an educational program for gifted students by

1. Securing appropriate resources, such as print and non-print material at an appropriate level, a variety of reference sources, access to other community resources, etc.;
2. Helping the student to acquire the skills of an independent learner.

Psychologist A psychologist can provide important information to aid in the identification of gifted students and in program planning. Services provided by a psychologist might include

1. Administering and interpreting individual psychological tests;
2. Assessing other factors which might impact on school performance such as emotional and physical factors, learning styles and issues relating to trauma;
3. Prescribing services necessary to meet the needs of the individual gifted student.

Every community is also rich in resources which can be used to improve and support services for the gifted. Contributions from community volunteers might include serving as mentors/coaches; sharing hobbies, careers and experiences; demonstrating and/or teaching skills.

FUNDING

A program of appropriate services for gifted students requires adequate financial support. State law mandates appropriate services whether or not adequate exceptional children funding is provided by the General Assembly through the State Department of Public Instruction.

Local school systems receive funding for the education of gifted students through a variety of sources. Several points need to be noted in this respect:

1. Local school systems receive a set amount of money from the state for each student enrolled. These funds are intended for the instruction of all students. Gifted students are counted as students in this manner and thus contribute to the total school budget for the education of all students.

2. A state-level funding formula determines the amount of money provided for the education of each handicapped and gifted student. This exceptional children money is provided in addition to the general allotment noted in number 1 above.

3. This funding formula also sets a maximum percentage of students in each local school system that can be counted for these funds. When the percentage of students identified as gifted exceeds this limit, no additional exceptional children funds are provided, but these students must still be served.

Support in the form of additional monies is required. Some kinds of support are:

Categorical Funds Categorical funds can enhance programs for all students, including the gifted. Current examples include funds for science and math equipment and supplies; funds for retraining science, math, computer and foreign language teachers; and Chapter 2 funds.

Competitive Mini-Grants Competitive mini-grants are often available, such as National Diffusion Network Adoptor Grants, which are designed for a large range of student abilities, as well as for specific programs for gifted students.

Staff Development Staff development funds can improve service delivery through the professional growth and education of all staff members regarding the special needs of, and services for, gifted students. Staff development funds for State Aid to Exceptional Children, State Certified Personnel, State Personnel and funds from Economic Security Act Grants (Title II) and other sources are available for this purpose.

Local Funds Local funds may also be used to support gifted programs and are an indication of local commitment. Some school systems use local funds to provide additional teachers for gifted students, and materials and equipment for classrooms for the gifted.

Corporate and Foundation Grants A school system may seek funds from less conventional sources. Administrators should actively pursue corporate and foundation grants for innovative projects which might include gifted students. Z. Smith Reynolds and Carnegie Foundation grants are specific examples.

In the final analysis it is access to adequate funding that helps guarantee that appropriate services can be provided. Administrators are responsible for seeking and acquiring these resources. The sources change frequently, but announcements of most state and federal grants are sent to all superintendents. Assistance is also provided by the State Department of Public Instruction in locating possible sponsoring agencies. Grant consultants are listed in the Directory of the State Department of Public Instruction.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The majority of the "essential elements" of programs providing an appropriate education for gifted children which have been presented to this point include factors which operate primarily within the school environment. However, the effectiveness and success of a program for gifted students depends on clear understanding within the total community of the reasons for and procedures of that program. This clear understanding is tantamount to positive awareness, advocacy and community involvement. Basic to this "essential element" is the responsibility of the school to describe and demonstrate what "giftedness" is, so that the entire community understands that gifted students require an education which goes beyond the regular school program, thus justifying the mandate for appropriate services.

Here are some examples of the ways in which the school can create this awareness:

1. A well-planned public relations program, using all available media, to explain all aspects of the program for gifted students.

2. A regular schedule of conferences and progress reports with parents of gifted students in which teachers, administrators and support personnel are involved. This should include well-organized and informative GEP and or IEP conferences.

3. Planned sessions with the other educative agencies in the community such as museums, theatres, libraries, youth organizations, civic groups, etc., in order to develop cooperatively special programs and shared use of facilities, staffs and resources on behalf of gifted students.

4. Recruitment of parents to assist in the above, as well as to carry out volunteer functions such as service as teacher aides, mentors or members of advisory councils.

In like manner, individual parents and parent groups can initiate, and cooperate with other organizations in planning and implementing programs and activities for gifted students. In this regard, attention is called to the growing number of chapters of PAGE, Parents for the Advancement of Gifted Education. This advocacy association has a lengthy list of activities and projects which have proven to be beneficial to gifted students. Some examples from this list are the following:

1. Saturday and/or after-school enrichment classes geared specifically to the interests and needs of gifted students.

2. Summer classes, camps, seminars, trips, etc. which go beyond what schools generally offer.

3. Establishment of a "mentor" program where gifted students can associate with and learn from community and regional leaders in a wide variety of human endeavors.

4. Sponsorship of programs such as "Odyssey of the Mind" or "Future Problem-Solving Program."

5. Establishment in the school, in a public library or in a civic center of an appropriate reading and resource center that is geared to the interests of gifted students and their parents.

6. Appropriate fund-raising procedures for purposes deemed functional and beneficial to the local needs of gifted students, such as scholarships for gifted students for extended studies, travel, conference attendance or individual research projects; scholarships for teachers of the gifted for advanced study, conference attendance, etc.; procurement of special materials and equipment needed in the program for the gifted.

Finally, community awareness and cooperative parent involvement must be achieved in order to effectively round out the complete picture of productive appropriate services for the gifted.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Program evaluation is a necessary activity to ensure program quality. Program evaluation addresses the issue of whether or not the stated goals and objectives of the program are being met. Examples of such goals and objectives are the following: increasing the use of productive thinking skills by students; improving the questioning strategies used by teachers; improving the self-concept of gifted students. Specific goals and objectives will determine the nature of the instruments used for the evaluation. Methods of evaluation might include teacher ratings, attitude scales, criterion-referenced tests, quality of student products, student reactions and test scores. There are two specific ways in which program evaluation can serve a useful purpose.

Formative Evaluation Specific information about program strengths and weaknesses is provided by evaluator(s) to the staff on an on-going basis for the purpose of adjusting programs and services in order to improve program quality.

Summative Evaluation Information can be provided by evaluator(s) about the degree to which the program is meeting its goals and objectives. This information provides program accountability to the public and the educational community.

Despite the desirability of such evaluation, it has had limited use in programs for gifted children. The reasons for such a limited response are both psychological and technical.

Few people enjoy being evaluated, despite the beneficial results of such activities. Unless there is administrative commitment to evaluation as a key part of a total program, it is easy to overlook or avoid. The other reason is that most professionals working with gifted children have not received specific instruction to enable them to carry out the often difficult technical procedures required of a strong evaluation effort. There is a need for both in-service training and technical assistance to programs to help local school systems establish good evaluation methods.

It should be recognized that a small amount of additional funding is required to carry out these procedures and to provide for necessary training and technical assistance. This sum of money is necessary to justify the investment made in the larger program.

There should be a clear expectation that programs for gifted children will include, on a continuing basis, program evaluation procedures for formative evaluation, and, periodically, for summative evaluation.

FACTORS BEYOND LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEM CONTROL WHICH AFFECT PROGRAM QUALITY

There are important factors that affect local program quality that are not under the direct control of the local school system. These factors are influenced by the type and amount of resources provided by state, federal or private sources. Just as national weather forecasting can be valuable to the local farmer, so can nationally supported educational research be of value to the local educator.

The following are important components of a total program for the education of the gifted and influence programs in local school systems.

Personnel Preparation Well trained personnel are obviously essential to a quality program. Only a limited number of colleges and universities in North Carolina provide a *systematic* and *operational* training program leading to certification in education for the gifted, because the limited number of participants in this special training program cause higher education institutions to lose money. Consequently, teachers in many parts of North Carolina do not have access to a higher education training program in education for the gifted.

Program subsidies and teacher incentives from both state and federal levels have helped programs for handicapped children (other exceptional children), but neither subsidies nor incentives are currently available for personnel preparation for the gifted. Such program subsidies would encourage training program quality as well as economic viability.

In addition to personnel preparation at the college and university level, there is a strongly felt need for funds for comprehensive in-service training both for teachers of the gifted and for elementary and secondary teachers who will be interacting with gifted children in their classrooms. Funds earmarked for in-service training are needed to meet this need.

Program Evaluation Sufficient funds need to be made available to the local school system to allow them to carry out a continuous evaluation program designed to systematically improve the operation of the program, and to assure program accountability. Without such evaluation efforts, programs can often stagnate or lose their sense of purpose and direction.

Research and Development The education of handicapped children has been transformed by federal research funds earmarked for these children that have stimulated the use of new technology such as microcomputer programming, new curriculum innovations, and the application of many new teacher strategies to enhance instruction. No such support is currently available for the area of education for the gifted, and its absence has inhibited the emergence of new program ideas and development.

Demonstration Programs One of the strong motivators for educational improvement in all fields of education is the visible presence of effective programs that are working well in school settings comparable to that of the interested local education system. For example, experience has shown that an urban program of excellence will appeal especially to school systems of similar urban settings, while an exemplary rural program would attract local educators from rural settings. Therefore, a diverse set of demonstration programs is needed. Such demonstration programs can also provide additional training in the functioning of such programs and in the transfer of exemplary practices.

Personnel preparation, program evaluation, research and development, and demonstration programs have been the key elements for quality control and improvement in the fields of agriculture, industry, and health. They need a more systematic application in eduation for the gifted in order to yield similar benefits. The local school system can rarely provide support for such activities, so help must be found elsewhere. These system components, when effectively implemented, can complement the work done in the local school system.

WHAT IS AN APPROPRIATE EDUCATION FOR A GIFTED STUDENT?
-An Overview and Suggestions-

Based on the report by the
NCAGT Task Force on Appropriate Services for Gifted Students
Lyn Aubrecht, Chairman

Why do gifted students need an appropriate education?

In the United States of America, in the 1980's, it is widely assumed that children have the right to grow toward the fulfillment of their potential and that public schools should support this development. This should be true for all children, and it is no less true for gifted children. It is their right. It is also probably true that to the extent that such development is not supported, some aspect of their ability is not made manifest. The child loses and we lose. Gifted children have the potential to provide us with the advances and solutions that we need as we move into our future. It is in our vested interest to provide for their development. Finally, in North Carolina the law requires an appropriate education for all children with special needs, and gifted children are considered to be children with special needs.

What was the Task Force on Appropriate Services for Gifted Students?

The Task Force on Appropriate Services for Gifted Students was made up of 194 people. In order to assure representative input, teachers, principals, parents, program administrators, counselors, psychologists, school superintendents, school board members, college/university professors, and other community leaders from a wide range of geographic areas, sizes, and types of communities and schools from all over North Carolina were involved. An attempt was made to include the most knowledgeable people in education for the gifted in North Carolina. Over a year's time, all school systems, all members of the State Organization for the Gifted, and all local parent associations for the gifted were surveyed. A group of 12 individuals then met for five weekends over a six-month period to analyze data, engage in a lengthy discussion of issues, and ultimately to draft statements organizing this information. The "advisory committee" made up of the remaining 182 individuals responded to summaries and drafts of working group activity, and in essence, worked to provide the perspective that a smaller group could not have. The result was the Task Force report entitled, <u>What is an Appropriate Education For a Gifted Student?</u> This effort was

sponsored as a public service by the North Carolina Association for the Gifted and Talented.

What were the goals of the Task Force report?

The first goal was to help define the concept of "an appropriate education," as it applies to a gifted student. As a requirement of law, this concept is very important. A second goal was to help identify the important elements and issues that local school systems need to address if an appropriate education is to be provided. Not all educators have a great amount of background in education for the gifted. The Task Force, on the other, represented a lot of people with significant and varied experience in this area. Wouldn't it be good if they could share this knowledge by listing some of the most important things to consider when building a program for gifted students? In this way, school systems that want to do what is right for their gifted children could have some guidance in doing so.

How was the concept, "an appropriate education," defined?

An appropriate education was defined by the Task Force in terms of "the extent to which the needs of individual gifted students are met by the school system." If the needs of the student as a gifted student are met by the school system, the education is appropriate. If the needs of the student as a gifted student are not met by the school system, the education is not appropriate. The goal of this education is to give each child an <u>opportunity</u> to grow toward the fulfillment of his or her potential. Thus, this education does not guarantee that a child will fulfill his or her potential, but it does assure that an informed, goodfaith effort will be made to give the child a chance to do so. This education is not defined in absolute terms, like a set number of hours per week in a given setting, but with regard to the impact that any service has on a particular child.

What "elements" were identified as being essential to programs providing an appropriate education for gifted students?

Eleven elements were selected by the Task Force as "most essential" for any program attempting to provide an appropriate education for gifted students. In addition, within each of these essential elements, a number of factors and issues were identified as things that need to be addressed by local school systems when planning, implementing and supporting such a program. These essential elements are outlined beginning on the next page along with a few highlights related to each one.

Administrative Support and Responsibility In order to have a quality program for gifted students, you must have administrative support. The main responsibilty for providing appropriate services for gifted students is that of the administration.

Definition and Identification Identification is the process of finding those students whose characteristics match the definition. A two-stage process for this was recommended, and suggestions for the additional testing of some students were discussed. It was also noted that "giftedness" can encompass a broader range of ability than is denoted by the term "academically gifted."

Assessment of Student Needs While identification determines whether or not a student is appropriate for the program, the assessment of student needs helps to determine whether or not the program is appropriate for the student. The assessment of both group and individual needs were considered.

Written Plan A written plan outlines a system's unified efforts to provide appropriate services to its gifted students. It defines a program. It provides for continuity and development. A written plan can include all of the elements discussed in this report.

Program Options Both group and individual program options should be combined to form a program that is flexible enough to meet the varying needs of gifted students. (The key here, perhaps, is to actually have options. These need not be formal options, but any program that provides services in only one way, will, sooner or later, encounter a child for whom that option is not appropriate.) Time is a critical factor in determining the possible effectiveness of any option.

Curriculum Curricula for gifted students must be responsive to the characteristics that separate the gifted from the non-gifted. They also assume the existence of an adequate general education program, that curriculum modifications will directly address the academic content areas in which the students' strengths are identified, and that instruction will be on a level commensurate with the students' ability.

Teachers The importance of teachers in the education of gifted students cannot be overstated. Whoever assumes responsibility for the academic content area in which the student is identified as gifted, is charged with the appropriate education

of that student. The teacher of the gifted must be certified in education for the gifted. Classroom teachers and others who have a significant responsibility for the education of the gifted students should also be trained in education for the gifted.

Support Services Other professionals important in providing services for gifted students include school counselors, media specialists, psychologists, and others. Staff development is necessary to enable these individuals to understand gifted students and to meet their needs.

Funding A program of appropriate services for gifted students requires adequate financial support. State law mandates appropriate services whether or not adequate exceptional children funding is provided by the General Assembly through the State Department of Public Instruction. Additional monies are often required. Possible sources of this support were considered.

Community Awareness and Parent Involvement The effectiveness and success of a program for gifted students depends on a clear understanding within the total community of that program. It is the responsibility of the school to communicate what giftedness is so that the entire community understands that gifted students require an education which goes beyond the regular school program, thus justifying the mandate for appropriate services. Parents can also plan and implement programs and activities for gifted students. PAGE (Parents for the Advancement of Gifted Education) chapters have proven to be beneficial in this regard.

Finally it was recognized that there are Factors Beyond Local School System Control Which Affect Program Quality, things such as personnel preparation, program evaluation, research and development, and demonstration programs. Local school systems are limited as to how much they can do to directly support these functions. They can, however, encourage state, federal, and private sources to do so.

What can local school systems do to make best use of the report?

First, it is important that all individuals who are involved in making and implementing decisions that affect gifted students, read and become familiar with this report. This is not as easy as it might appear. The Task Force Report is not a complete discussion of all possible elements and issues put together by a single author. It is a compendium of many important elements, issues and ideas, sometimes briefly stated, put together by a committee. Some of these concepts may require elaboration or

extension by persons truly familiar with this area. Second, your current program of services ought to be evaluated in light of the elements, factors, and principles outlined in this report. Has your system considered all of these issues? Are you satisfied with the decisions that have been made, and with the implementation of those decisions? Do they in fact combine to provide an appropriate education for all of your gifted students? Third, the report could be used as a basis for program improvement. Many of the factors outlined in the report exist on a continuum. "Absolute minimum" levels of some factor could be improved to "better" or to "even better yet." What aspects of your program, in your situation, could be improved for the benefit of your students? What resources could be applied to these improvements, and what kind of a time-line could be employed? You might even consider making the answers to these questions a part of your written plan.

What can individuals do to support the movement toward providing an appropriate education to all of our gifted students?

Help us assure that all educators and community leaders are aware of the importance of providing an appropriate education for gifted students. Support those individuals, particularly on the local level, who are trying to do "the right things" for gifted students, and let them know of your support. Gifted children do have special needs. With your help and support, gifted children all over North Carolina can have those needs met, and in so doing -- like all other children -- be provided with an opportunity to grow toward the fulfillment of their potential.

Would you like additional information about the task force report and related topics?

A carousel slide presentation of the Task Force Report with optional audio tape or script, suitable for use during inservice training sessions, workshops or parent association meetings, will soon be available from your North Carolina Regional Education Center for short-term use, free of charge. School systems or parent associations should contact their nearest Regional Center for additional information. (Williamston, 919/792-5166; Jacksonville, 919/455-8100; Raleigh, 919/733-2864; Carthage, 919/947-5871; Greensboro, 919/334-5764, Charlotte, 704/392-0378; North Wilkesboro, 919/667-2191; and Waynesville, 704/452-0363.) In addition, sessions about implementing various aspects of the Task Force Report and/or sessions pertaining to many related topics can be expected to be included at the state gifted conference for years to come. Contact the North Carolina Association for the Gifted and Talented for up-to-date information (c/o Dr. Linda Morris, 1756 Stonewood Drive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 27103.)

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